

Entrepreneur Spotlight

WORKHORSE COFFEE BAR

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TY BARNETT AND SHANNON FORNEY
OF WORKHORSE COFFEE BAR

As Ty Barnett and Shannon Forney watched the Green Line LRT being built, the actualization of a dream began. With over 20 years of expertise both managing and operating independent coffee shops, Ty always dreamed of having her own coffee bar. Shannon, an arts administrator with a M.A. in Non-Profit Administration, had just received her degree from Hamline University in 2011. While Green Line construction was underway, the couple realized the timing could not be more right for them to begin the process of starting their own business.

“Our customers are civic folks, non profiteers, artists, young families, and creative people who are connected to the neighborhood. On the weekends, parents bring their kiddos to sit in our front window and sip hot chocolate as they watch the Green Line trains go by.”

Shannon Forney, Co-owner, Workhorse Coffee Bar

NDC was able to help Ty and Shannon secure a sizable SBA loan. Shannon said, “As a young couple, we didn’t have the start-up capital to launch the business without NDC. NDC was instrumental in our start-up.” The location they chose (which is located ½ block west of the Raymond Avenue LRT Green Line station in St. Paul) needed a lot of work. While the space had previously been a coffee shop, it required a major overhaul. A counter and a sink were needed, a re-design was necessary, and the infrastructure required plumbing, electric and an ADA compliant bathroom. 75% of the SBA loan received through NDC went to help with these improvements and the rest towards start-up costs.

The couple is amazed and thrilled at their own success. Business has exceeded all expectations and the Pioneer Press

named them as a community gathering spot. Workhorse Coffee Bar has big wooden tables for groups to hold 2-7 person meetings, which is fantastic considering they’re right in the heart of many non-profit organizations and close to a charter school.

NDC: WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE YOUR BUSINESS BE IN ABOUT 5 YEARS?

WORKHORSE: “5 years from now, we would love to join the food truck entrepreneurs and operate a mobile espresso bar in addition to our store-front. If we can figure out the logistics of executing this vision during winter months, we are pretty sure it would be a hit.”

NDC: TELL US ABOUT BEING HOME TO THE SMALLEST MUSEUM IN ST. PAUL (SMSP).

WORKHORSE: “We are home to the Smallest Museum in St. Paul, a community arts project to curate a micro-museum inside a vintage fire-hose cabinet just outside our front door. SMSP is a 3ft x 2ft micro museum, and was initially funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation as part of the St. Paul Arts Challenge. This little project has had a BIG impact. The inaugural SMSP year features a range of emerging and established artists, as well as makers who do not identify as artists, but rather are historians, biologists, and administrators. This is part of the SMSP vision - that this museum is for everyone. There is no admission fee, anyone can visit and it’s open year round. The Smallest Museum in St. Paul is a space for art, humor, engagement, reaction and public discourse.”

NDC: WHAT ARE SOME HOBBIES EITHER OF YOU HAVE?

WORKHORSE: “Ty collects vintage motorcycles, and has a love for mechanical tinkering. The love for mechanics and tinkering is a useful skill set at the coffee shop. Ty adjusts the coffee grinder and espresso machine many times throughout a typical day. To make great coffee, you have to dial in the details; water temperature, the espresso grind relative to humidity, and the characteristics of each roast of coffee bean. Ty prides herself on knowing how to adjust and account for all these factors for a consistent product. I (Shannon) have a background in theater and perform locally from time to time.”